



working
for
you, me, we,
us, and them

Do you pay taxes, give charitable donations,
think that the world has some things wrong with it?
Are you concerned with how politicians spend
your money, how the media represents issues,
with violence, war, and the environment?

Well this zine is for you!

Using INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence's anthology *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*, as well as many other sources, this zine explores the non-profit industrial complex and takes a look at how we work to make our world more live-able for everyone.

OR

WHAT'S THE NON-PROFIT
INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX AND
WHY SHOULD I CARE?

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~~more resources~~
FOR MORE INFORMATION

Read - Paulo Friere's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Audre Lorde's *Sister Outsider*, bell hooks, INCITE!'s *Color of Violence*, Robin D.G. Kelley's *Freedom Dreams*, COINTELPRO Papers, Ruthie Wilson Gilmore's *Golden Gulag*, <http://www.enoughenough.org/2010/05/community-reparations-now-tyrone-boucher-and-tiny-aka-lisa-gray-garcia-talk-revolutionary-giving-class-privilege-and-more/>, Critical Resistance's *Abolition Now!*, www.still.myrevolution.tao.ca, *Outlaws of America* by Dan Berger, Peggy McIntosh, *NON-PROFIT INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX: A Love story and Other Poems* by Thornton Kimes



Look (artists) - check out the Just Seeds Collective, Dignidad Rebelde, Trust Your Struggle, Eastside Arts Alliance, www.poormagazine.com, Alfredo Jaar,



Listen - download podcasts from the Freedom Archives (www.freedomarchives.org), Story Telling and Organizing Project (www.stopviolenceeveryday.org)



Watch - *The Spook Who Sat By The Door*, *The Wind That Shakes the Barley*, *Bastards of the Party*, David Gilbert: *A lifetime of Struggle, I Won't Drown on that Levee and You Ain't Gonna' Break my Back*, *A Place Called Chiapas*, *Cultures of Resistance*, *The Fourth World War*

more zines at zeeninginlaos.wordpress.com

Responses? Ideas? More resources? Please email npiczine123@gmail.com



IN CONCLUSION....

There are many ways to organize, many models and solutions, and of course nothing is cut and dry. *"Perhaps the real problem is that we don't spend enough time imagining what we want and then doing the work to sustain that vision"* – Adjoa Florencia Jones de Almeida 187.

From a friend: "What are the ways ppl resist not in the context of being part of an organization. Cultural resistance and more. When someone speaks in any language/vernacular that isn't "standard" English. When a sex worker fights back against a cop or John. When two queer high schoolers sneak into the locker room to fuck. All the living and dreaming and scheming and loving that happens not just to survive (which we have to) but that makes our world have room for more of us. Ppl figure out how to take care of each other, and organizations help. But there are lots of other contexts too."



This is a zine about the non-profit industrial complex, as well as a zine about how we live our lives.

We all have agency to direct our lives (some with a wider context with which to move in). Every choice we make – though some things may not seem like a choice – affects someone else.

From the product made in a factory in China (metals from mines in Africa, plastics from oil in Burma, sent to your hands by boat or plane, sold by a retail worker) to what you do with the hours of your life, you are affecting yourself and the world around you. It's not just for non-profit/non-governmental organization workers – this is a zine for anyone wondering why the world is messed up and what to do about it.

This zine is full of questions. When we ask these questions, it's not an exercise in guilt or hatred. This is called love. Not Valentine's day cards style of love (romantic, cheesy, awkward) - loving enough to do work fully and with your whole heart, to work together with people who are different from you, and to be critical and open. So often in the nonprofit world it can be about overworking yourself to show you are the most committed, the best person, the martyr. This zine isn't about you, it's about all of us!

LET'S LAY SOME GROUNDWORK

I believe in an ideal world where people are able to determine their own lives, have enough, without harming others – in a world not determined by scarcity, but abundance (not a plastic bag, but a seed). A world where collective decisions are made, and people are accountable to each other. And I believe this world is possible – and believing in an ideal world's possibility is a strategy for living and doing. And I am female-bodied and identified, middle class, from the US, a reformed liberal (as David Gilbert said in *No Surrender*: *I was in transition from a liberal, who wanted to 'uplift' the oppressed (to make them more like me) to a revolutionary, who realized that oppressed people like themselves must become the arbiters of their own destiny*). And I am creating this while on the dole of a



government grant. This goes against my politics, and I have to reconcile who this zine is accountable to, and what is it part of, with that fact. If I was acting as a free, unfunded individual, maybe things would have been different (which illustrates a piece of the ability of funding to crumple energy and movement).

Politics are the things in your head, heart, and body that help you understand how to live and move in the world. It's in your head and in your actions. You live your politics, and that is what makes you human – you are living your politics without even knowing it – but knowing helps you live and do better. From voting to jokes, from TV to sex, it's all politics.

Capitalism – not the root of all evil, but close. The real problem is interlocking systems of domination (read bell hooks – that's an author!) in its different forms (sexism, heteronormativity, racism, white supremacy, able-ism, etc), which many capitalist states produce/are a product of. Capitalism says those that deserve it access what they need (and then some), and those that don't have access don't deserve it. It operates on a scarcity model, must always be expanding, and *poverty and environmental degradation are inherent within it*. Everyone cannot have enough (food, shelter, water, space, meaningful work, health, education) within capitalism – because then who would be the cheap labor, provide raw materials, etc? And if there is abundance – and enough – how could that ever be profitable?

The state – the resource and manpower amassing set of powerful interests, policies, laws, and institutions that order people's lives and perpetuates itself through oppression of dissent and along lines of race, class, gender, sexuality, etc.



{ SOME ANSWERS FROM MY FRIENDS AND ME }

"my ideal world is one where the fear that produces exploitation and violence melts under the heat of hope, creativity, and communal joy. my strategy is to start from within and practice peace and critical thinking, and to further my understanding of what is going on, and to share what i know with others. to move against the default of consumption and conformity to insist on big love."

"why aren't universities implicated in this paradigm. when you think of foundations and imported regimes that undercut people's movements internationally, one of the first things i think about is the complementary academic institutions that produce our politicians, statisticians and more increasingly aid and ingo workers. certainly one of the roots /centers in terms of defining not just the ideology but the very terms of engagement, and the actual "specialists"/"UN/humanitarians"/bankers that maintain NPIC. my personal shtick against universities aside, reading the INCITE summary made me strangely uncomfortable. It made me think of the activist-organizer (two different categories actually) as walking some scale that measures how "clean" they are."

"I would like to live in a world where we have balance. We need to have a mutual respect and the law to protect all of us where money is not the power. I don't know how to get there but we can build small community where people are willing to live together on this idea. I do not mean the communist system like the commune. what are politics? No hope for the time being."

SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF AND FRIENDS

WHAT DOES YOUR LIBERATION LOOK LIKE?

Who supervises your work?

Which direction does your accountability lie?

Are you involved in a greater movement besides a one or few-issue struggle?

Are you sharing access to power and resources with those on the frontlines of the struggle?

Do you help people come together?

What are you modeling?

Are you objectifying your constituents – or are they truly at the heart of the organizing?

What difference does their difference make (race, ability, gender, sexuality, etc)?

Do you believe there is a fundamental difference between yourself and those you are organizing/representing?

What do you think is radical change?

What is the nature of oppression?

How can you integrate your political participation into your daily life?

Are you separating the form and the content of your struggle/work?

What if your job was a passion, not your job?

Where are you/your organization as a people's social justice movement in your country today?

And – the nonprofit industrial complex (NPIC). A text I refer to in this zine (if it's not cited from another book) is *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex*, edited by Incite! Women of Color Against Violence (©2007, South End Press, ISBN: 978-0-89608-766-8). Get it! Read it!

↑ it was the inspiration for the whole zine!

From INCITE!'s website: (<http://www.incite-national.org/index.php?s=100>)

The non-profit industrial complex (or the NPIC) is a system of relationships between the State (or local and federal governments), the owning classes, foundations, and non-profit/NGO social service & social justice organizations that results in the surveillance, control, derailment, and everyday management of political movements. The state uses non-profits to:

Monitor and control social justice movements; Divert public monies into private hands through foundations; Manage and control dissent in order to make the world safe for capitalism; Redirect activist energies into career-based modes of organizing instead of mass-based organizing capable of actually transforming society; Allow corporations to mask their exploitative and colonial work practices through "philanthropic" work; Encourage social movements to model themselves after capitalist structures rather than to challenge them.

What I got to say about it: expands capitalism and keeps a group of elites in power/money while appearing humanitarian, diffusing and channeling dissent – a complex interaction of practices, models, institutions, and bureaucracies. It is a way for people who understand that the world is unfair, but are still investing in their privilege/the system they know, to careerize social justice (that used to be me). It has replaced grassroots, mass-based movements that truly challenge the systems of oppression with stressed-out, professionalized, and vision-less groups.



Write a few strategies to get there:

Who will you work with? Who are your current allies and possible allies?
What work is being done now?

VISION OF AN *ideal* *world*

EXERCISE

Draw your vision of an ideal world here:

Don't doubt yourself. Go as far and deep as you can. Give some general and specific ideas. Collage, draw, write – it's OK!



A FEW MORE DEFINITIONS

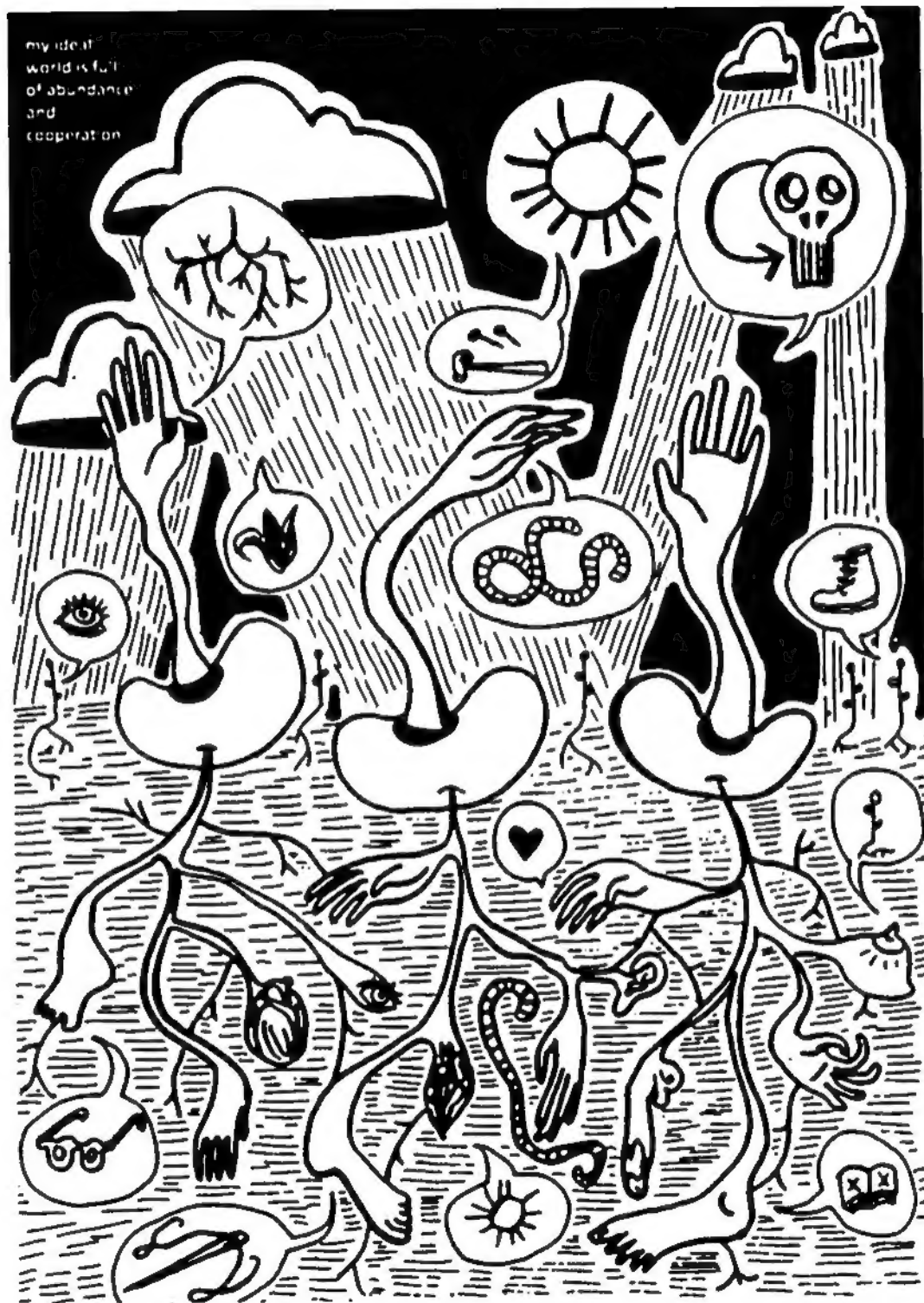
Shadow state – Andrea Smith says: “a network of institutions that do much of what government agencies are supposed to do with tax money in the areas of education and social services”.

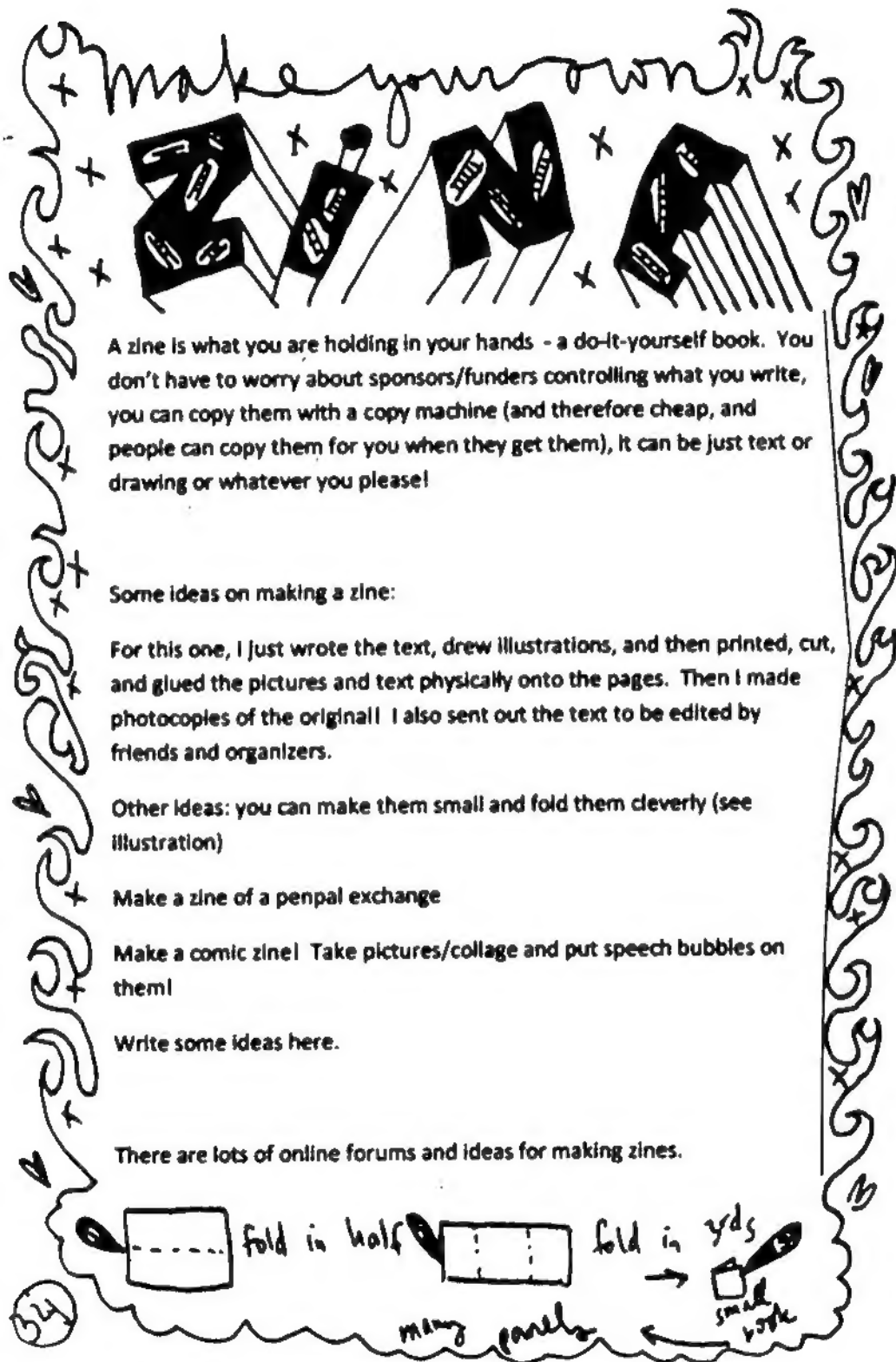
Grassroots – a collective of people working together for a short, mid, and/or long-term goal that doesn't rely on state or shadow state funding, and therefore is accountable to itself, is part of a larger movement, etc. Can be rightist or leftist.

Interlocking systems of domination – racism, sexism, able-ism, heteronormativity, etc and how they overlap (ie a black woman is differently experiencing oppression than a gay white man). bell hooks uses this phrase to define the politics of domination, “a belief in domination, and a belief of superior and inferior” (can be capitalism, can be communism, etc). She also names it as “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy”. For more, check out <http://www.mediaed.org/cgi-bin/commerce.cgi?preadd=action&key=402>

Violence – it's not just about gangs, or terrorists, despite what the media may have you think. Violence can be interpersonal (between individuals or groups), or it can come from the state in trickier ways – ie by creating borders that capital can cross, but not people, by using police and militaries to enforce laws as opposed to creating real safety through livelihoods, peace, and sustainability, and by creating systems that structurally support the interlocking systems of domination (eg building prisons instead of schools, privatizing education, unfair lending practices, military recruiters in poor schools, etc).

"It takes violence to breed injustice, it takes violence to keep injustice" – Ana Clarissa Rojas Durazo 121





Transformative justice (from a workshop by Young Women's Empowerment Project in Chicago) - acknowledges that systems/states cause harm. It transforms the experience of violence or harm and acknowledges the different ways people may act or what they do. It values building community from the ground up and transforms cycles of violence, building collective structures, meeting people where they are, developing a safety strategy (focusing on increasing the ability of folks to be in control of their choices)

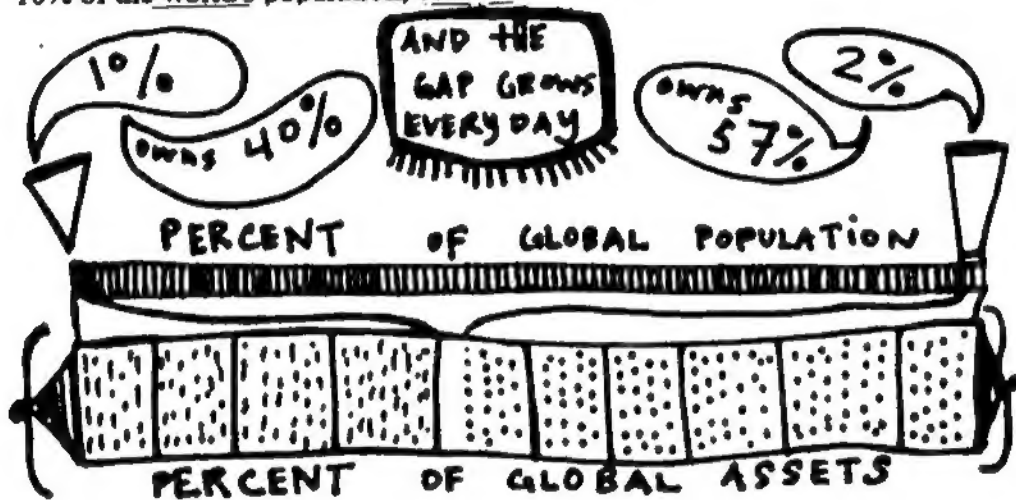
Oppression - racism has been defined as what causes an early death (ie lack of access to healthcare, higher exposure to pollution or to war, poverty, etc). Oppression works the same, but chooses different lines across which to determine the means - and is wider than that, because oppression hurts the oppressor too - through lack of agency to make change in a sick world, through guilt, through environmental problems, etc. More about oppressor to come.

*CAUTION: working while visionless may cause serious movement (change, solution) impairment.

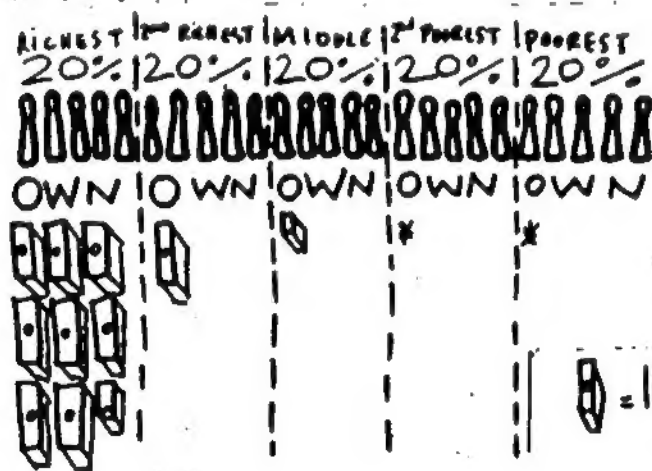


AND GLOBAL BACKGROUND

- 50 % of the world population own less than 1 % of the global assets.
- "The richest 1 percent of people in the world receive as much as the bottom 57 percent, or in other words, less than 50 million richest people receive as much as 2.7 billion poor." (Milanovic 2002, p. 50)
- The three richest people possess more financial assets than the poorest 10% of the world's population, combined



IN THE U.S.A. : : : : :



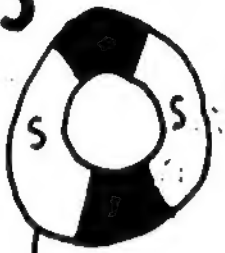
* NOTE: because of their small percentage of the share of total wealth, a full 40% of the population's wealth is so NEGLIGIBLE that IT'S NOT VISIBLE

$\text{H} = 10\% \text{ of wealth}$

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SUGGESTIONS
FOR
SURVIVING
THE
NPIC

<http://www.gayshame.com>



<http://www.gayshamef.org/creatingchains.html>

****Use the photocopier for all your activist needs, and let all the radical collectives in town know you have access.**

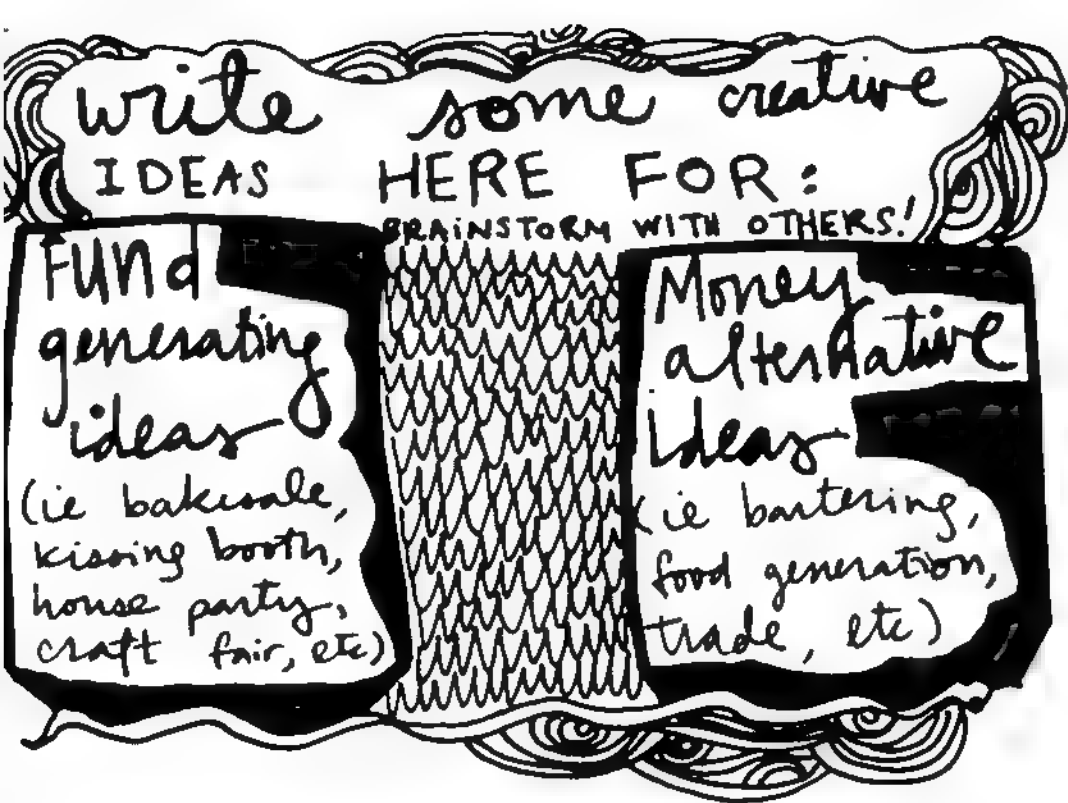
****Use your time there to research projects that can become direct-action and to find scandalous information about your own non-profit. Did the ED fly to Rio last week for an "Oakland community meeting"?**

****Call in sick, often.**

****Strategize with coworkers about how to stage a takeover of your non-profit.**

****Collect home addresses, phone numbers and the likes of important city officials and socialites. Your non-profit's phonebook may make a good read.**

****Raid the office supply closet for paint, staplers, pens, tape and anything else that may be much more useful.**



Other ideas for what to do if you are wealthy at enoughenough.org 32

What's at stake?

Subcommandante Marcos of the EZLN speaks of WWII: (WWIII = Cold War)
"The fourth world war is where the logic, organization, and violence of the market is deployed in always increasing disbursements to all corners of the world and to all aspects of life. Violence, in its myriad manifestations – economic, environmental, militarized borders and wars of terror, attacks on language and culture, and more – is deemed a natural phenomenon by imperial and corporate powers [...] and non-profititization of our social movements is wielded as a weapon in the fourth world war" Ana Clarisa Rojas Durazo 113.



And what does this war look like?

Land – without a strong resistance, all land will be owned – and not by you, not by the people who have been there for a long time, not by those that work it; it will be owned by corporate and state greed. And that land will not be allowed to just be land, or small farms – that land will need to be used for all of its immediate value with no regard for its future state (eg minerals are extracted by any means necessary or monoculture cash crops raised on limits of biological processes) often resulting in long-lasting-destruction, destroying the possibilities of autonomy and freedom. That is the vision of capitalism, and there are lots of strategies in place to get there!

Species extinction rate – For the first time since the dinosaurs disappeared, humans are driving animals and plants to extinction faster than new species can evolve. The rate of extinction had reached 100-1,000 times that suggested by the fossil records before humans. Biodiversity is what makes the earth work, yo!

Language extinction rate – The Endangered Language Initiative (ELI) lists 750 languages that have become extinct or are on the brink of extinction. Of the estimated 7,000 languages spoken today, one vanishes every 14 days when its last speaker dies. This is a direct result of colonialism and global neoliberal capitalism – and the death of a language is part of the death of a culture, and the death of a culture the death of a tool for self-determination, the loss of indigenous solutions, and the slaughter of diversity (not statistics of race, but the multitude that allows us to come together from different perspectives to imagine a world where all of us can live). Why else would boarding schools and other colonial projects be so strict about banning indigenous languages?

War that keeps killing – in Laos, the 270 million bombs dropped by the U.S. during a secret war (1964-1973) had a 30% failure rate, leading to 80 million unexploded ordinance, of which only 1% have been cleared and continue to maim and kill people (a huge percentage of which are children) everyday – about 300 people per year. And the new nature of war? Before bombs dropped in Iraq, the cleanup contract was signed, showing the embedded need for war to generate profit as opposed to peace.

Imprisonment rates – the U.S. prison system (including policing, surveillance, militarized borders, etc) is a skyrocketing and unprecedented punishment complex that cages over 2.3 million people (1 in 100 doesn't

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What ABOUT the MONEY?

"We have internalized the idea that power – the ability to create change – equals money" Adjoa Florencia Jones de Almeida 187

Stephanie Guilloud and William Cordero argue that "fundraising is not a dirty word": that grassroots fundraising is organizing. "Fundamentally, economies are about the give and take of resources. In a community-based economy, resources flow from and return to that same community." 109

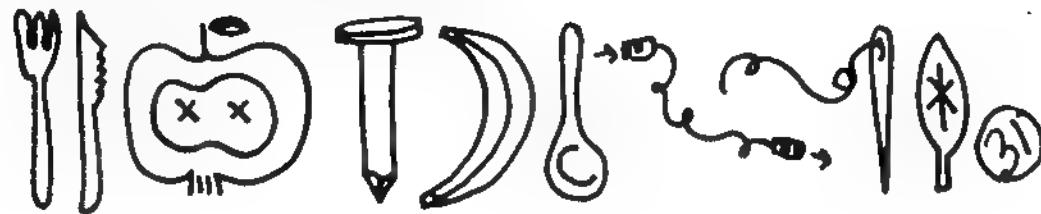
One idea is membership fees. Getting people to pay into what they are working on/believe can be education, can be capacity building, can be buy-in/ownership – and it doesn't have to be much. If your work can't be effective because you have to constantly pander to your funders, manage reports, invest in branding, and other non-work work, why not try to divest?

"The purpose of work is to gain liberation, not to guarantee the organization's longevity" – Angela Davis, 51

There are organizations that are able to walk the fine line between funding from state/foundations and being real in their work – but it's tough!

"The work is not just about what we do, but how we do it; the process is just as important as the outcome." Amara H Perez 97

And your job? Well, we have to work at building alternatives to feed ourselves, take care of our children, and house ourselves so we don't need as much money (collectives for day cares, gardens, housing), and figure out a balance. Café work? Self-defense teaching? Think of something!



Black Mesa Resistance: For over thirty years now, the communities at Big Mountain Black Mesa have carried out staunch resistance to the efforts of the US Government and Peabody Coal Company who continue to devastate their community through racist and environmentally destructive coal mining operations. On behalf of their peoples, their sacred ancestral home lands, and future generations, these communities have continued to defy the federal government's colonial efforts to throw them off their land. These courageous communities serve as the very blockade to coal mining!

<http://blackmesa.org/>

Lots of ones I don't know about – how many grassroots, small, unbranded, amazing groupings of people are there out in the world doing work to fight oppression and join together to realize a beautiful vision? A gazillion! No, really! This is an amazing part of our world – there are so many horrible things going on, but probably an almost equal number of groupings of people using their brains, hearts, bodies, and spirits to fight them. All across Latin US, Africa, and Asia people are making mass-based horizontal decision making and other things its hard to believe are possible. (check out the MST in Argentina – Landless Rural Unemployed Workers Movement)

What are some
that you know?

WRITE HERE:

inequality. And this style of policing/death is a global product – the U.S. imports technical assistance from Israel, for example (the wall on the US-Mexican border was built by an Israeli company – the same one that built a wall there).



Movement sinking - "Movement-sinking ideologies from the state, non-profits, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is handed out alongside billions of dollars in funding" – Ana Clarissa Rojas Durazo 124. The biggest loss is the loss of our spirits and hearts. Without our creativity, wisdom, and love pooled into ideas, actions, and revolution, we are all losing. As Angela Davis asserts, organizing can produce communities of struggle!

Oppression – Oppression is multi-layered, multi-bodied. And for many NGO workers, who come with privilege (race, class), it seems like the oppression we work to fight (ie poverty, racism, environmental racism, land-stealing, etc) doesn't really apply to us. We do not *have* to "save" people from their oppression, but we seek to do so out of the goodness of our hearts and a righteous quest for justice. However, I have been taught by elders and youth and organizers about oppression: that it applies to me in myriad ways – I am oppressed when oppression exists, it estranges me from community, from love, from accountability, from a world where I can talk to people and they can talk to me ("criminals", poor people, trans people, etc) and perpetuates harmful systems (violence, war, environmental degradation) that will affect me. I was recently asked how the prison-industrial complex affects my life. While I don't have any relatives/close friends in prison, I grew up in Marin County, the wealthy home of San Quentin Prison. I therefore have a visual reminder of how my over-privilege (excellent public schools funded by the tax dollars/other dollars of rich white folks who benefit from poor working conditions of others, housing that is segregated from the populations that are disenfranchised, freedom from pollution while across the Bay low-income communities live next to a Chevron refinery, etc) is connected to the imprisoned under-privilege (poor schooling, lack of opportunities for employment, lack of health care, colonialism, displacement, racism etc) of the prisoners inside. My community had money to invest in the things that make people healthy, cared for, and have some semblance of ownership over their fates (as long as they played by the rules), because their activities for survival were ~~legitimized~~ (as opposed to sex work, panhandling, etc). This money comes from profits/investments/a capitalist system that has to pay low wages and cut costs in order to make a profit and has a poor/working class structured in to it. And those are disproportionately the folks who end up in prison. And when I can start to fight that prison system, build with people inside and outside, my own community and communities that are traditionally not "mine", I see how fear and state violence have kept me away from working towards sustainable, loving, and collective solutions to the problems that affect everyone – environment, bodily safety, soul and heart safety, food security, housing, health. Fighting against oppression of all peoples is not merely a choice (career or otherwise), but rather the only path to my own liberation and that of all those who inhabit this planet.

(12)

making, and aim, above all, to build a society grounded in justice and peace for all" – Paula X Rojas 199. The Zapatistas don't just try to dismantle/destroy state power and replace it with another form – they work to build from the power that people already have. Pablo Gonzalez Casanova says "The project will have succeeded when the struggles for autonomy have evolved into networks of autonomous peoples. Its objective is to create – with, by and for the communities – organizations of resistance that are at once connected, coordinated, and self-governing. [...] At the same time, as far as possible, the communities and the peoples should immediately put into practice the alternative life that they seek, in order to gain experience. They should not wait until they have more power to do this." Now there's a vision! They've created their own justice, health care, agricultural, and education systems – armed struggle is a very small part of what they do.

Sista II Sista Collective – started as a grassroots New York organization and transitioned into a nonprofit, and then back out again. All major decisions are made by consensus, all staff members receive the same pay, and coordinate specific work areas. SIIS holds Freedom Schools, creates Violence free spaces, block parties, protests, etc. For more information, check out ? <http://www.sistaisista.org/>

Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People – Shell Oil has been destroying Ogoni (an indigenous group in the Niger Delta) land, forcefully taking it from them, killing Ogoni leaders and people, and suppressing protest through militarized Nigerian state actions. According to Nigerian author and MSOP leader, Ken Saro-Wiwa, "The Ogoni people have now decided to make a last ditch stand against the government and against Shell that have ripped them off for the last 35 years." The Ogoni are seeking autonomy and environmental protection, control of a fair share of the revenues from their resources, and cultural rights despite the execution of their leader, the deaths of many, and the declaration by the government that disturbances of oil production are a crime. (for more information, scope out <http://www.mosop.org/>)

Poor Magazine – From their website: POOR Magazine the publication arts and education project was started in 1996 by an indigenous, landless mother and daughter who struggled with extreme poverty, incarceration and criminalization in the US. POOR Magazine, the organization, is a poor people led/indigenous people led non-profit, grassroots, arts organization dedicated to providing revolutionary media access, arts, education and solutions from youth, adults and elders in poverty across Pachamama. "At POOR, we refuse to talk in outcomes—how many poor people did you teach in 2009, how much did they learn, how many jobs did they get, how long did they stay in their housing, and all that crap. Not only is that shit disrespectful, but it wastes a lot of time, a lot of energy, a lot of fucking trees, and a lot of people's work that could be spent on actual solutions. At POOR, we root what we do in spirituality and love and ancestor worship. It's not religious—it's an understanding that everyone comes with different relationships to the earth and our spirits and our beings and our gods and our folks, and the bigger understanding that we're all really invested in the care of each other" – Tiny, aka Lisa Gray-Garcia, cofounder (with her late mama, Dee). For more, check out <http://poormagazine.org/>

* I don't ^{work} speak for any of these orgs -
apologies if my summaries are wrong! (29)

"What's wrong is not simply the economic dependencies fostered by this particular set of relationships and interests. [...] what's wrong is that the work people set out to accomplish is vulnerable to becoming mission impossible under the sternly specific funding rubrics and structural prohibitions that situate grassroots groups both in the third sector's entanglements and in the shadow of the shadow state." Angela Davis, 47

Who wants to be a part of mission impossible?

So – how to shake that off. All across the world, what is truly making change are the mass-based, grassroots movements that connect their struggles to larger ones. There are so many models, practices, and solutions out there.

"Organizations are only as good as the united fronts they bring into being" Angela Davis, 51, and "Social change is only radical if it promotes struggle and growth at every level – for the society at large, in our intimate and everyday relationships, and internally within ourselves" Adjoa Florencia Jones de Almeida 192

Here are a few examples of organizations doing work that is accountable to their members, to their earth, and to a greater movement for justice and sustainability.

Young Women's Empowerment Project – a Chicago-based harm-reduction and transformative justice organization that works to build a movement amongst girls, including transgender girls, and young women, including trans women, who trade sex for money, are trafficked or pimped and who are actively or formerly involved in the street economy" (from their *Girls Do What They Have To Do To Survive: Illuminating Methods used by Girls in the Sex Trade and Street Economy to Fight Back and Heal* participatory action research study). They are a non-condemning organization that uses a set of social justice strategies anyone can use, by starting with a justice framework and giving people the right to self-determination and empower people to make choices to feed their health and well-being and break down problems into small pieces (acknowledges the structural nature of harm, poverty, and violence). Examples of their work include a safe space, a toolkit for health issues based on their participatory action research, an outreach zine, bad encounters line (reporting discriminatory experiences), youth activist camp, etc. (for more, check out www.youarepriceless.org)

EZLN (Zapatista National Liberation Army) – began an armed uprising by indigenous peasants in Chiapas, Mexico on the day that the North American Free Trade Agreement was signed. Their movement had been in the works for a long time, organizing along principles of autonomy and horizontalism – "recognize daily life and the creation of liberated communities as political work; support collective, nonhierarchical decision-



CASE STUDY WHAT'S UP IN LAOS?

Laos' relationship to the NPIC is a perfect example of the NPIC's structural underlying purpose: to expand capitalism/oppression and keep a group of elites in power/money while appearing humanitarian and channeling dissent.

Laos history as a monarchy, colonial state, revolutionary state, communist state (in rhetoric/flags), and capitalist state (in practice) all belie its position in Southeast Asia as a crossroads for major powers.

In 1986, after a failed socialist/communist experiment of restructuring agriculture and government (following a war to oust the French colonialists and a 9 year secret war with the United States where 260 million bombs were dropped from 1964-1973), the Lao state found itself strapped for cash and suddenly open for business – and it would take whatever business it could get, while making sure to properly bureaucratize the process to make sure they had power (and could put a little in their pockets). Foreign aid was welcomed, without any need for evaluating its efficacy or having much power in the aid's conditionality. Post-French colonialism, the French funneled American funds (who were working to "contain communism" in Southeast Asia), and then the Americans effectively ran the government by setting up parallel departments to all government ministries and controlling aid (ie soldier's salaries) to control the country. For more information, read *History of Aid to Laos* by Viliam Phraxayavong.

Rich countries were more than happy to throw money in the pot. A mineral-rich, untapped country in a strategic position? No embargo on this sickle and hammer. Rich countries know the power of being a donor – you get to call the shots on how things are developed. As a former official in the US Agency for International Development stated in 1964, "the main objective of foreign assistance, as of many other tools for foreign policy, is to produce the kind of political and economic environment in the world in which the United States can best pursue its own goals" (*History of Aid to Laos*, Viliam Phraxayavong, 2009, p 14). Aid works to "undermine democratic accountability within countries" (25), and because aid is so heavily conditioned (ie receiving countries must buy import products from the giving country, structural adjustment programs that create trade rules,





that benefit the global market and gut the local ones, etc), it doesn't allow governments, which are supposed to represent people, to make the choices that will best benefit them.

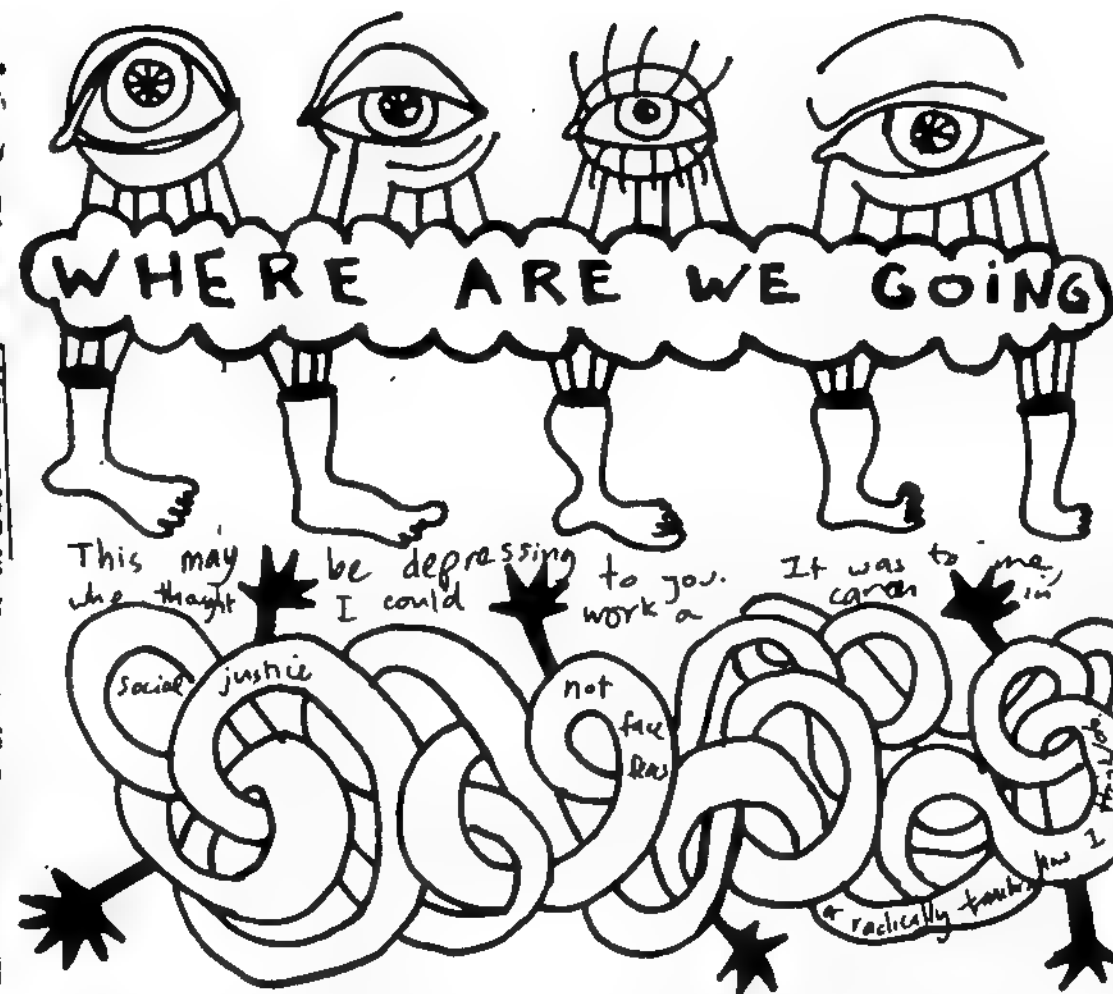
Today, there are many NGOs in Laos, doing the work the state is supposed to do, but the state is too broke. Printing school books? Doing education about the unexploded ordinance left over from the secret war? Training farmers to use the technology that donor countries happen to produce and would be glad to sell? Don't worry, the donor countries got it – and the solutions the NGOs propose for the problems are single-minded in their purpose – “develop” Laos into a market economy, grow jobs/grow consumers, and keep that capital invested in the country moving. The Mekong is open for damming, the mineral deposits open for mining, and the middle class is buying – and the foreigners can all get jobs in a tropical country.

Of course these NGOs are helping people eat and survive. But people should be able to survive on their own terms, not on the terms of wealthy, neocolonial/imperialist countries who stole the resources and money in the first place.



“What are the implications for a social justice movement in which power and resources are being transferred based on one's ability to develop a relationship with the right white people?”

—
TIFFANY LETHABO KING & EWARE OSAYANDE, 82



However, once I started facing those fears – and confronting my fears as a white middle class woman of people of color, poor people, a radical politics – I found that the work I was doing was much more challenging, but a lot less full of contradictions/failures. It is part of imagining what we want the world to look like, and then making it happen – it is part of living. This idea came to me from Critical Resistance, an organization that works to abolish the prison industrial complex (PIC) – they believe that the PIC doesn't make us safer, can't be fixed or reformed or improved, and we need to abolish it and create alternatives together. Inspiring!

I've learned that if I really wanted change, it's not just going to be me – it's going to be everyone, and the non-profit/NGO structure just doesn't do the kind of organizing needed to get everyone involved and working!

Post-1960s US – according to Diana Block, who went underground for her political activities in the seventies and re-emerged to find the NPIC in full swing, in her awesome memoir *Arm the Spirit*:

"As I walked around the streets of the Mission [a gentrified formerly majority working class Latino neighborhood in San Francisco, CA, USA], I could still feel the insistent presence of progressive politics...Yet, as I began to investigate their programs and activities, it seemed that each one operated separately from the others, pursuing projects and goals that I supported, but without the breadth of vision or ideological orientation that was necessary to build a more unified political movement. In fact, the burgeoning non-profit industrial complex seemed, in many ways, to have taken over the spirit and structure of the left.

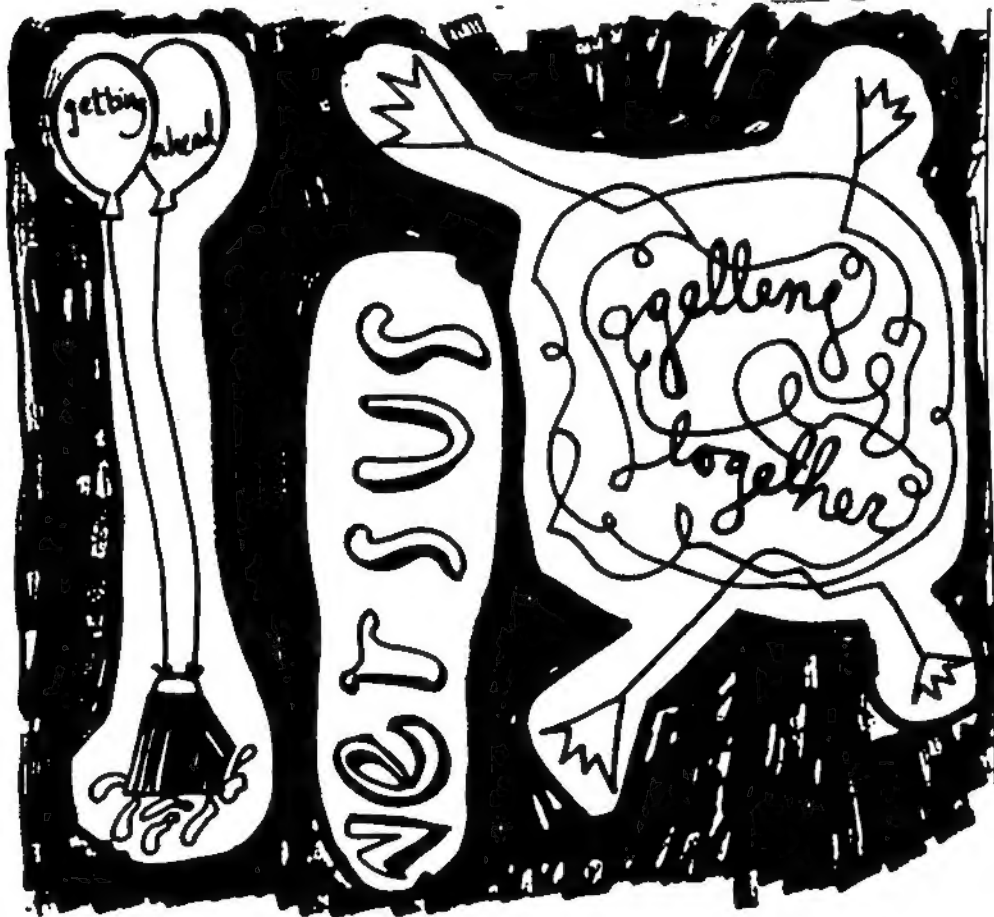
The positive missions and programs of the non-profits were distorted by the competitive drive for funds and marketable agenda, which too often seemed to mirror rather than challenge corporate templates. In the seventies, we had funded our political activities through salaries from 'straight' jobs, a multitude of benefit events, and individual donors who supported our goals...Now the situation had flipped and young progressive people searched for jobs with non-profit organizations that could fulfill their desire to do meaningful, social change work. But jobs were tied to funding and funding was tied to the thousands of foundations that had mushroomed in the past twenty years, efficiently modeling the corporate mentality for the well-intentioned non-profit sector. Instead of working together, each non-profit was fragmented to its own track, scurrying competitively to procure grants and recruit the youthful, passionate, hardworking personnel who would ensure its survival. I couldn't prove it, but it seemed like a deliberate, systemic plan to co-opt and disorganize the left under the guise of working for social justice."

"In the end, the management skills required to maintain the operation of non-profit organizations become more important than the organizing skills needed to develop grassroots leaders, make institutional change, develop methods to raise community consciousness, or build a movement." Amara H Perez 98

Why sell your work to funders (turning into a product) instead of making something real? Packaging your organizing into year-long projects is not going to bring about long-term change. The nonprofit, 501(c)3 model (a tax/political certification) should not replace grassroots movements. And these grassroots movements are happening, we just have to dig a little to find them!



"The focus on the individual achievements of a few can distract us from looking at why there is not enough affordable housing, educational opportunities, and jobs for everyone." 135



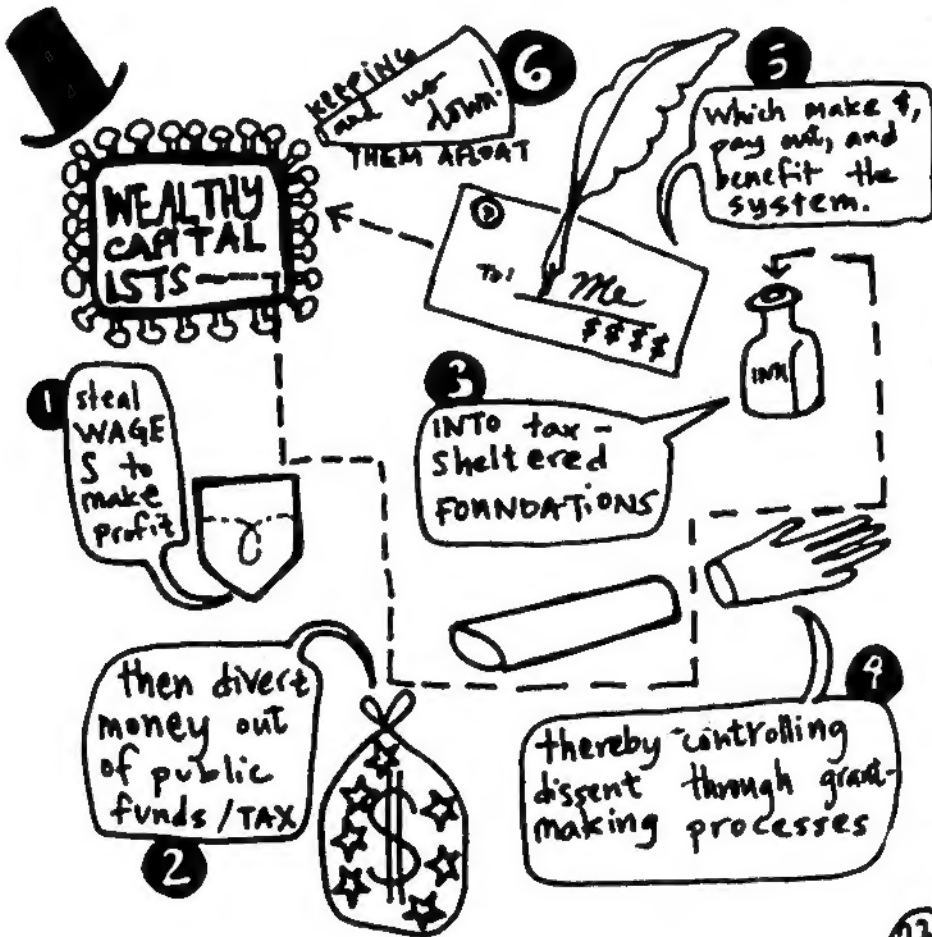
Paul Kivel talks about getting together vs. getting ahead. He means the strategies of helping a few of the disadvantaged/oppressed get ahead, versus building collective power within the larger group to organize for their collective well-being.

This has a lot to do with Laos, and thinking about the whole development thing. He differentiates between *social service work* ("addresses the needs of individuals reeling from the personal and devastating impact of institutional systems of exploitation and violence" and *social change work* ("challenges the root causes of the exploitation and violence").

Mini case study: For instance, Ahn points out the effects of the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations' roles in the Green Revolution in the global south by pushing Western scientific agricultural techniques to increase crop yields. What it mostly ended up pushing was capitalist land policies that suppressed communist revolts (ie in Mexico and India) by stabilizing free market governments. "Foundations [...] played a pivotal role in advancing technological solutions to problems that threatened elite control: political instability and population growth." 72

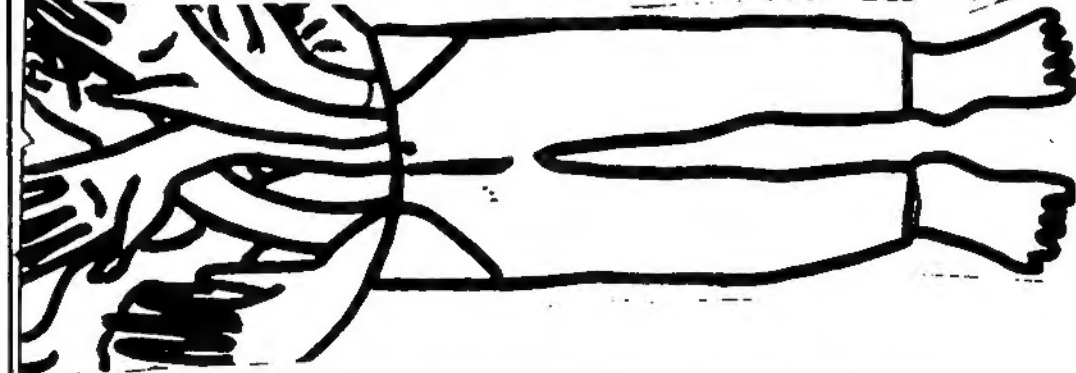
You may ask – isn't stability a good thing?

Not when consent is manufactured and dissent is oppressed. When change is channeled into ineffective and false bandaids that leave the internal bleeding intact.



CASE STUDY WHAT'S UP IN THE U.S.A.

"From their inception, foundations focused on research and dissemination of information designed ostensibly to ameliorate social issues – in a manner, however, that did not challenge capitalism" – Andrea Smith



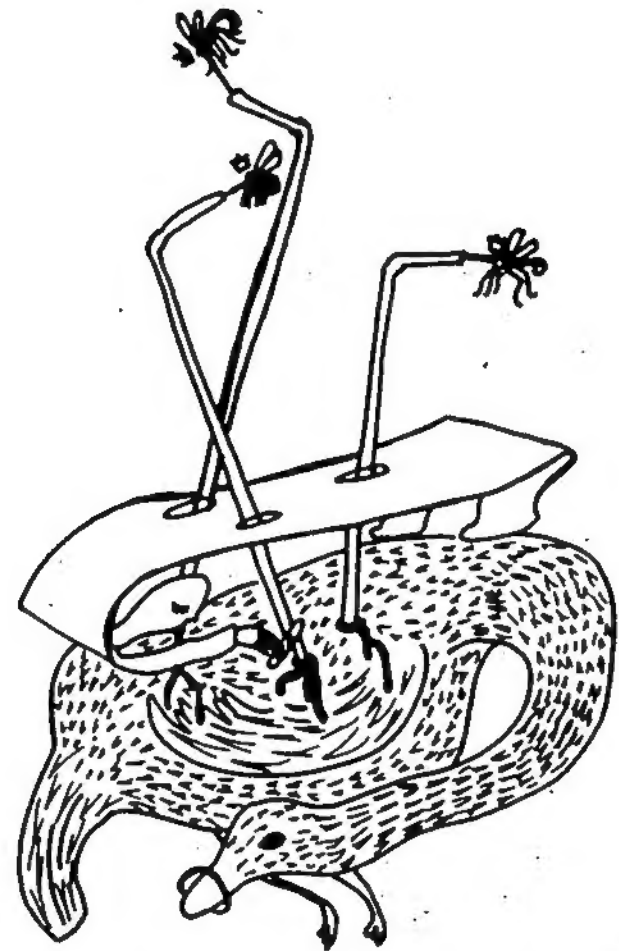
History of the NPIC according to Angela Davis/who was paraphrasing Jennifer Wolch: from 1933-1973, there was a huge wave of expanded government agencies and services, and then the huge attempt to dismantle that safety net across the board that continues today (ie guaranteed employment, health care – the reforms are flimsy, maternity leave, etc).

Foundations, or "repositories of twice stolen wealth – (a) profit sheltered from (b) taxes" – Angela Davis, 46, are a huge part of both global and US NPIC issues.

According to Christine Ahn, the state faces bigger and bigger deficits yet issues passports to wealthier and wealthier citizens, who pay less and less taxes: reduced tax rates, and bigger gifts to charity. The money that should have been going into taxes goes into foundations – a tax shelter for estates, which otherwise would have to pay 50% to the treasury treasury – a foundation is only required to pay out 5% of its assets annually as the trustees see fit. Foundations largely benefit the wealthy, many of whom actually earn huge incomes from being trustees, and enjoy lavish fundraisers and galas. Because the social justice movement has become professionalized and reliant on grants to do their work, the wealthy control dissent and our imaginations for justice and channel it into their interests. And the problems that the foundations are supposedly "fixing" are often caused by the corporations that donate to them!

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The NPIC acts as a buffer zone between the wealthy and the poor/middle class – taking care of people at the bottom of the pyramid. Without a buffer zone or some semblance of care, people would be dying in the streets. It also creates an illusion of progress, and has created more controlling elements. It often propels success stories into the light (they've helped "lift" those people up and get ahead), but does nothing (or little) to bring people closer together to make structural change.



This kind of work ends up propagating the belief that "it is the responsibility of society not to guarantee material security for all, but merely to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to get ahead. Those who are deserving will get ahead; the rest will fail because of their own laziness, ignorance, or lack of discipline" 141

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WHO ARE YOU?

ACCOUNTABLE

TODAY

